

A Revisionist Swashbuckler:

My Memories of Bradley R. Smith

[Theodore J. O'Keefe](#)

I first met Bradley Smith thirty-one years ago. It was early 1985, I had just moved to Southern California from Japan, and Bradley was waiting for me in front of the Los Angeles bus station. He was twenty years older than I, we had different backgrounds and aspirations, and we were friends from the beginning. That first encounter, in which we rambled through L.A.'s decaying downtown, set the tone for hundreds that followed— talk that flowed and rushed like a spring thaw, with scenery and watering hole (Philippe, as I recall) incidental to observation, reminiscence, point, counterpoint, argument, open discussion that reveled in disagreement and debate.

From the start we shared a commitment to Holocaust revisionism, and soon a camaraderie, as we worked together, first at the Institute of Historical Review, where I pressed Bradley to stress, rather than his occasional pratfalls, his on-air achievements in his accounts of his work for IHR's Radio Project. Later I advised and edited Bradley's efforts on behalf of his Committee for Open Debate on the Holocaust, through which, more than any other revisionist, he was able to gain Holocaust revisionism notoriety at hundreds of American universities and in perturbed editorials in the national news media.

Our approaches to revisionism were different. I had absorbed much of the historiographical tradition of America First while growing up, and further saw revisionism as playing an active role in the defense of the West. For Bradley, Holocaust revisionism was first of all an issue of individual free expression. He was not so much interested in how the Holocaust did or didn't happen (I once called in during a local radio show Bradley was doing to lob him a batting-practice question about the Leuchter Report, but no, he couldn't recall any studies of missing cyanide residue in the "gas chambers"). Nor did Bradley trouble very much with the complexities of central European polity between the wars: to him, for invading Poland, Hitler was merely an "asshole."

Furthermore, my ideology was not very touchy-feely, whereas Bradley was not only rigorously libertarian, but also a long-time consumer of Southern California mysticism and admirer of its adepts, from Krishnamurti to Baba Ram Dass. What won my admiration of Bradley was that at its core Bradley's ethos was a soldierly one. Apart from one uncharacteristic episode in the bull ring, he lived a life of physical courage and personal responsibility, and his code of conduct—his simple but difficult struggle to be in "right relationship" with all others—impelled him relentlessly toward self-mastery.



Bradley R. Smith, swashbuckling, dangerous, honorable, and real.

Readers of Bradley's numerous writings will be aware of how he risked prison for refusing to stop selling the (allegedly obscene) writings of Henry Miller, how he was drawn to combat in Korea and South Vietnam, the varied physical and financial risks he ran throughout his pre-revisionist work career. But his willingness to face danger was neither mere thrill-seeking nor simply the dedication of a zealot to his cause. Several times in 1986 I accompanied Bradley to his office in a building at Hollywood and Vine (once the crossroads of the film industry, then a sagging neighborhood). Not long before, bombs planted by Jewish terrorists had burnt IHR's offices to the ground as well as killed two persons in Southern California. On each visit, Bradley, alert to the danger, would shoo me up the hall, so that he would take the brunt of any booby trap. During our friendship of three decades, I many times witnessed the same vigilance and readiness to act decisively in a crisis.

As Bradley reveals in *Confessions of a Holocaust Revisionist*, from adolescence his mission was to be a soldier. Unlike a myriad of youths from his generation, Bradley's exemplar was not the combat hero of Hollywood film, but a self-sacrificing champion from over a thousand years before, Roland, whose chanson roused his soul like his hero's belated horn. As did the lord of the Breton March in the epic version, Bradley came to strive to be not just a warrior, but a warrior of high ideals and irreproachable comportment. Clausewitz's assessment of war as a calculated act of policy was foreign to Bradley's soldierly creed. Good in a crisis as he could be, throughout his career Bradley often called to mind, more so than even Roland, the ever dauntless man of La Mancha.

This soldierly romanticism was central to his dedication to fighting for the revisionist cause, in fact as the most accessible and exposed spokesman for that cause in America, for over thirty years. It brought potential physical danger to him and his family, possibilities he either dismissed with characteristic good humor or left unmentioned. Then there were the economic consequences: Bradley supported himself and his family not by tilting at windmills, but by attacking, in full public view, the Taboo of the Twentieth Century. He declared bankruptcy more than once, and he always seemed just an illness or an accident away from poverty.

Was Bradley's abhorrence of system, both in business and in writing, somehow connected to his soldierly ideals? In any case in his conduct of the business part of CODOH, it is not enough to say that he was undisciplined and unbusinesslike: Bradley's methods verged on chaos, and record keeping, planning, and the basics of fundraising—including contributions—periodically disappeared under the growing and multiplying ziggurats of paper on his and neighboring desks.

As a writer, Bradley disdained structure and literary artifice. He was an indifferent speller and ignored the rules of grammar even where he knew them. His sole instruction to me in my efforts to order his tangled prose for *Smith's Report* was: "Don't make me sound too smart." If he had a writing style, it was to let it all flow, let it all hang out. Nonetheless, reading Bradley's best revisionist writing, it isn't hard to see that it catches fire when touched by his moral and ethical concerns. In dry-as-dust matters such as historiographical details or his need for contributions his writing often clunks along (particularly in the first draft) as if it were on an iron long. But when he describes an individual, friend or foe, Bradley meticulously renders dialogue in all its nuances, and he homes in on his own and his disputant's obligations as citizen and as human with Socratic penetration and ethical fervor.

In his dealings with his adversaries—whether Exterminationist or revisionist—Bradley tried to be kind. His efforts were generally unrequited, which didn't seem to trouble him, for he held himself to a much stricter standard for taking offense than most of us. When reminded of certain of his persistent revisionist detractors, Bradley liked to tell me, "We've never had a problem," which was usually true—as far as he was concerned.

Various remembrances of Bradley have stressed the achievements made possible by the irenic side of this quixotic soldier. Yes, by not making the Jews as a collective the target of his revisionist efforts he was able to gain considerable purchase with the student editors who enabled him to place hundreds of his campus ads in their papers. And yes, his good nature and his eschewal of racial concerns enabled him to win the cooperation of able revisionists around the world in establishing the Committee for Open Debate on the Holocaust, and its spinoffs such as its powerful website, as well as the short-lived journal *The Revisionist*, which paved the way for *Inconvenient History*.

But Bradley had a combative side as well. It tended to emerge when he, or those he spoke for, had been backed into a corner. I first saw this in 1985, after the Institute for Historical Review had made a humiliating settlement with the boastful Auschwitz survivor Mel Mermelstein, giving him \$90,000 and an apology after he had sought IHR's ill-conceived reward offer to the first to prove gassings at Auschwitz. Now largely forgotten, at the time the settlement seemed even to IHR supporters a craven surrender of the Institute's basic principles. It was Bradley Smith, as editor of IHR's newsletter, who sounded the revisionist counterattack, calling Mermelstein a "demonstrable fraud" and a "vainglorious prevaricator." Predictably, Bradley's words brought on a new lawsuit, but this time, after a long and

costly struggle, the Institute was victorious, and, just as important, was able to regain the unwavering support of revisionists.

A few years later, when Ernst Zündel was tried a second time for violating Canada's foolish law against spreading "false news" about the Holocaust and other sacred cows, Bradley played a key role in raising the morale of Zündel and his supporters. The early stages of the trial had been adverse to Zündel, leaving him and his team downcast. I vividly recall Ernst's jubilation over the phone at Bradley's testimony, in which with his common sense and aplomb he shredded the Holocaust mystique by cutting the testimony of various of its most sainted "eyewitnesses" down to size. Most memorable was his demolition of Elie Wiesel, who, Bradley told the court, was "not wrapped too tight" for claiming that geysers of blood had spurting from Jewish bodies in Ukraine for months after they were dead and buried. It would be too much to say that Bradley's testimony outweighed that of Fred Leuchter, Robert Faurisson, David Irving, and the many other witnesses to come. Yet by violating the Holocaust taboos against common sense and liberating laughter, Bradley dominated the courtroom and reversed the momentum of the trial.

When it came to taking on Holocaust historiography, Bradley was at his most powerful, whether in court, on the air, or in writing, when assailing the testimony of the most-prominent survivors—Elie Wiesel; Abe Bomba, the barber of Treblinka; "crazy" Jankiel Wiernik, the carpenter of Treblinka; and many others. It's not hard to see that Bradley's fury at these slandering impostors was fueled, not by hatred of Jews, but precisely by his insistence that Jews be judged by the same standards as non-Jews. Not that his equity could ever mollify the Holocaust lobby and other groups that act, with none but trifling opposition, in the name of Jewry. Nor, alas, did that equity impress the non-Jews throughout the media and academe that Bradley worked tirelessly to draw into open debate on the Holocaust.

Bradley was attempting a dangerous thing: treating Jews, even Jews who despised him, respectfully (in conciliatory fashion), while relying on support from hard-core revisionists. He wrote and talked often of his sorrow at the loss of his Jewish friends in Los Angeles, and this was certainly no pose. Yet despite his oft-proclaimed tolerance and his public embrace of David Cole, he was unable to elicit more than the occasional furtive nod from Jews, while Jewish organizations such as the ADL, the Simon Wiesenthal Center, and (the on-campus) Hillel House fought, with ultimate success, to keep him off campus and off the air.

I spent many hours with Bradley over the past thirty years, and was frequently his guest in Hollywood; in Visalia, a pleasant farming town in the southern San Joaquin Valley; and finally at the house he designed in Rosarito, some ten miles south of Tijuana and the border. Mostly we talked, a lot about revisionism and ideas for CODOH. (I recall that after one day-long brainstorming session, the woman of the house remarked in Spanish: "You work like donkeys, but you never make any money.")

Just as often we talked about everything else (science and math pretty much excluded). We went out a lot—which was no sacrifice, because Bradley had a genius for finding the best places to eat and drink—and talked some more. Bradley was the most interesting conversationalist I've ever known. He was intellectually sophisticated, not in the manner of the Harvard common room (against which he could deploy his working man's Socrates persona to good effect), but well-read in modern literature (of which he had a sizeable library), knowledgeable about art, and far better informed than most about the world and its political workings.

Bradley could muster enthusiasm for nearly any topic, from boxing to Buddhism. More important, he withheld nothing of himself in conversation. At the same time, he conveyed his intense interest in you, and he had the knack of making you feel you'd known each other your whole lives. He had that rare virtue, the ability to listen; and even rarer, the willingness to differ with his friends. To be sure, he could occasionally try to get under your skin with razzing of the barracks or locker-room variety, but only when he was losing an argument. Even during our final face-to-face encounter last fall, although physically frail, in conversation Bradley was engaged, observant, and alive.

Bradley Smith was not a believer in the conventional sense. He was certainly not a Christian, and his interest in Eastern meditation and other disciplines was furthered by the godlessness of their purest forms. His aim was to be in right relationship with everyone he encountered. Now "right relationship" is a term that is patently elastic and which has been appropriated by numerous contending churches and sects. Bradley's seat-of-the-pants interpretation included every charity of which he was capable, from giving to beggars to taking in the homeless, related or otherwise (one night on Hollywood Boulevard he took pity on a young Canadian down on his luck and brought him home to sleep over). It can be said, with no overtones of sanctity, that from his tolerant public stance to his conduct in private, Bradley was animated by a personal godness that his critics, including the Methodist minister J. Franklin Littell, who compared Bradley to "the adversary who wanders to and fro in the earth and goes up and down in it," i.e. Satan, would do well to try to emulate.

Humbleness and self-deprecation were part of Bradley's public persona. He loved to stress his shortcomings and mistakes. I came to believe that these efforts masked a deep pride. And, in the end, as a revisionist Bradley had a great deal to be proud of. In an area where, as in so much of life, success is a team effort, ultimately everything came down to him. He took on the biggest and most-heavily defended bastions of the Holocaust industry and its most-sacrosanct oracles. Even the evident failure of his outreach projects was a measure of Bradley's and revisionism's success: the professors he was always seeking to bedevil had no answers for his arguments.

When all is said and done Bradley Smith lived the life the academics and his other detractors pretend they want to lead—swashbuckling, dangerous, honorable, and real. And his revisionist work marches on, its victory never more certain.

Author(s):	Theodore J. O'Keefe
Title:	A Revisionist Swashbuckler:
Sources:	<i>Inconvenient History</i> , 8(2) 2016
Dates:	published: 2016-05-28, first posted: 2016-11-30 11:34:06

<http://inconvenienthistory.com/8/2/4160>